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PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHTV #1880/01 2391416
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 271416Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3203
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY 0076
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0464
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001880

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/26/2019

TAGS: PREL IN JA IS

SUBJECT: ISRAELI MFA ASKS USG TO BROKER OPENING TO INDONESIA

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an August 26 meeting with PolCouns senior MFA officials Kahanoff and Ben-Abba asked for U.S. help, prior to the scheduled November visit of President Obama to Indonesia, in facilitating the development of Israeli-Indonesian relations. Specifically, they asked if President Obama would raise the issue in his meetings in Jakarta as part of the broader U.S. effort to normalize relations with the Muslim world. Kahanoff also noted that Japanese Middle East envoy Imura has already agreed to reach out to the Indonesians during a visit to Jakarta scheduled for the week of August 31. Israel has several suggested goals for such outreach: formalizing communications between the two countries; the establishment of mutual representation or trade offices; and the facilitation of visa issuance.
End Summary.

¶2. (C) PolCouns and Deputy PolCouns met August 26 at the MFA's request with Deputy Directors General Ruth Kahanoff (Asia) and Irit Ben-Abba (Economic Affairs) to discuss taking advantage of President Obama's scheduled November trip to Indonesia to promote improved bilateral relations between Israel and the world's most populous Muslim nation. While the two countries do not have diplomatic relations, and Indonesia has never recognized Israel, Kahanoff noted that Indonesia and its leaders were not hostile to Israel and there have been quiet contacts between them for decades. She and Ben-Abba hoped that President Obama, with his personal ties to Indonesia, might be able to facilitate the establishment of closer relations with Israel, which they said would be consistent with U.S. policy of encouraging Islamic and Arab normalization with Israel.

¶3. (C) Kahanoff told PolCouns that Israel had last tried to open a trade office in Jakarta in 1998, and had been making good progress towards that goal when the 2000 outbreak of the Second Intifada torpedoed the effort. Israel currently enjoys good people to people contacts with Indonesia, Kahanoff said, with some \$300 million in bilateral trade between the two, and some 10,000 Israeli tourists visiting Indonesia each year. Magen David Adom, Israel's Red Cross entity, also trains its Indonesian counterpart and is helping to establish an emergency response capability in Indonesia.

¶4. (C) Kahanoff and Ben-Abba speculated that the recent Indonesian elections might present an opening for Israel. They noted that Indonesia supports the peace process and the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and had participated in the Annapolis Conference. Kahanoff and Ben-Abba observed that President Obama had mentioned Indonesia several times in his Cairo speech as a leader in the Islamic world, particularly given its significant role in Asia and participation in the G-20, and that closer Indonesian cooperation with Israel could be part of the confidence-building measures that the U.S. has been calling for.

15. (C) They said that although Israel's ultimate goal would be full diplomatic relations, for the moment it hopes to foster smaller steps. These would include formalizing communications between the two countries, the opening of mutual representation offices -- such as trade or tourism offices -- and the easing and facilitation of visa issuances.

The question of visa issuance is particularly important to Israel, as the development of further bilateral trade is hampered by the inability of Israeli business people to travel easily to Indonesia to both sell their products and then provide after-sale service. Kahanoff and Ben-Abba also said that those Indonesia Christians who wish to travel to Israel for pilgrimage must now travel first to Singapore for visas.

16. (C) In a follow-up conversation August 27, Kahanoff informed PolCouns that the MFA raised Indonesia several weeks ago with Japanese Middle East envoy Imura, a former ambassador to Jakarta. Imura reportedly responded enthusiastically and promised that during a visit to Jakarta the week of August 31, he would present steps toward Israel as a Japanese initiative. This was confirmed in a conversation between the Japanese Charg and our Charg in early August.

16. (C) Post would welcome Washington's response to this initiative.

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